

A reformed military for the 21st century

**By Dan Coats
and Joseph Lieberman**

The Report of the National Defense Panel (NDP) released today completes the second step in an ongoing process established by the Military Force Structure Review Act of 1996. In short, the legislation, which we co-sponsored, tasked the Pentagon to undertake the equivalent of a strategic housecleaning—a comprehensive, no-holds-barred assessment of every facet of our military driven by two fundamental questions. First, in light of geopolitical changes and the potential of technology, what new challenges, threats, and opportunities will our armed forces face? Second, how should we organize, equip, and size our forces to successfully deal with the broad range of threats they may encounter in the 21st century?

We did not think, however, the Pentagon realistically would be able to fully answer our questions. So we decided also to go "outside the box" to a group of distinguished independent military analysts, who would conduct a study in parallel with the Pentagon's in-house effort concluded last May, the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). This outside panel was to consider alternatives unencumbered by Pentagon policies, Congressional constituencies, or budget constraints. They have provided an alternative view, not based on distrust or suspicion of the Pentagon, but on the recognition that we need bold and innovative thinking from a variety of sources in this time of rapid change. As such, this National Defense Panel served two vital functions: as a hedge against the status quo and an independent validation of innovative recommendations proposed by the QDR. On balance, we believe the panel has produced a useful alternative view that we can use to continue and sharpen the debate.

We see four key elements of this alternative view.

First, the NDP makes a compelling argument that fundamental, not incremental, change is essential. Since the end of the Cold War, the Pentagon has significantly downsized our forces; yet the structure has remained pretty much the same. The NDP questions the course of existing policy and recommends, instead, that we develop and pursue a policy to transform today's post-Cold War force to tomorrow's information age force. New strategic challenges in areas such as power projection, space, and weapons of mass destruction and technological opportunities driven largely by the revolution in information have been so extraordinary that they could totally change the way antagonists will fight us. At the same time, these pressures create enormous opportunities for us to fundamentally improve our forces' capability. Consequently, we must revamp our strategic thinking and seriously question decisions that commit enormous national

resources toward capabilities which may be less relevant in the future.

Second, the NDP concluded we face greater risk in the future than we face today due to the nature, magnitude, and trend of these strategic challenges. Therefore, they recommend shifting our emphasis to aggressively developing future capabilities. Accordingly, we think this nation has a clear choice to make. We can continue our current course and accept much higher risk to our interests in the 21st Century. Or, we can increase defense budgets to maintain our current forces, while at the same time investing in future capabilities. Or, we can maintain defense budgets and cut our current forces and infrastructure as necessary to adequately fund the development of future capabilities.

Third, the NDP advocates bringing jointness back to the forefront. We agree and will strive to convince our colleagues to establish and resource an overarching process of joint experimentation charged to investigate what will and what will not work on future battlefields, as we integrate advanced technologies with changes in organizational structure and operational concepts.

Fourth, the NDP makes clear that other elements of the national security community, as well as our friends and allies abroad, have important roles to play. We support their conclusion that the interagency national security apparatus needs to be changed to more effectively integrate all the instruments of national power.

The NDP report is worth reading exactly because it is not a status quo document. Those looking for a validation of the QDR will be disappointed. Others will be disappointed because the panel does not explicitly recommend alternative force structures as specified in the legislation. We are not. The NDP's conclusion is that the future force must be thought of in different terms than Army divisions, air wings and naval carrier groups. Whereas the QDR assessed major theater warfare in terms of the last war, the NDP took an entirely different approach driven by an articulation of future

challenges from which they developed a template of critical force characteristics to meet them. This template should serve as the foundation for assessing our defense programs and also provides a new focus for the Pentagon's joint requirements process.

Recent events seem to validate the panel's conclusion. Our apparent difficulty in launching decisive land-based operations to counter Iraq's provocations suggest important limitations in the capabilities of our existing force. Therefore, we must experiment jointly to investigate the potential of a new, perhaps completely different force. This means that some systems currently in the field may be retired and some in development may be canceled. Others may be augmented or accelerated. And still others will need to be invented through the rapid pace of technological development.

In conclusion, we didn't sponsor the Armed Forces Force Structures Review Act of 1996 to reduce the defense budget. Our intent was to drive a strategy-based assessment of our military requirements and capabilities far out into the future, not to do a budget-driven, incremental massage of the status quo. The NDP has provided a vital service to this nation by concluding that we simply cannot ensure the United States' position in the world through projecting our current force forward. In short, our defense process needs to change. We need to transform our military capabilities to sustain the relative capability advantage we enjoy in the world today. And the National Defense Panel has provided us with the framework to proceed in transforming our military capabilities for the 21st Century. Now the task for the Clinton administration and the Congress is to establish and provide the resources for this transformation process and continue to push against today's status quo so that tomorrow's military will be ready to meet the security needs of the next century.

Sen. Dan Coats is a Republican of Indiana and Sen. Joseph Lieberman is a Democrat of Connecticut.